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March 18, 2004

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As you know, the draft Missouri River Master Water Control Manual and accompanying Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) were released at the end February. I have had an opportunity to review these documents, and am writing to express my disappointment that this revision does little to address the underlying problems with current management of the Missouri River. I urge you to modify the draft Master Manual to correct this oversight and provide equitable treatment for upstream states.

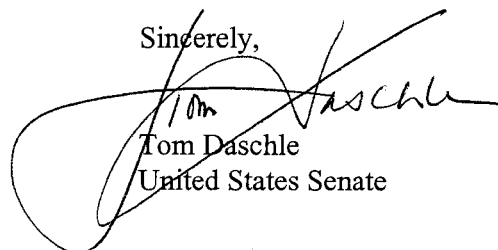
In February, I wrote to urge you to ensure the Master Manual is based on sound science and adheres to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2000 biological opinion and the 2003 amendment. After more than 12 years, I had hoped that the Corps of Engineers would develop a revised Master Manual that finally begins to reverse decades of mismanagement on the river. The Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Academy of Sciences have consistently stated that the river needs to be returned to more natural flows, higher in the spring and lower in the summer, to benefit fish and wildlife habitat. The draft Master Manual does neither, and instead insists on continuing to operate the river for the benefit of a handful of downstream barges at the expense of fish, wildlife and recreation in upstream states.

The Corps does provide one sliver of relief in the Master Manual, in the form of drought conservation measures that the Corps states would retain more water in the reservoirs during a drought. But these new measures do nothing to help upstream states like South Dakota now, when we are already in the midst of the worst drought in a decade. We cannot conserve water we do not have. The science could not be more clear – we need a comprehensive change in the way the Missouri River is managed and a reevaluation of the Corps' priorities. In this regard, the draft Master Manual is severely lacking.

The comment period on the Final EIS ends this Friday, and the time to correct these problems is now. The science is clearly on the side of doing the right thing on the Missouri River, but the Corps has chosen a path that will only lead to years of additional problems and conflicts over the Missouri River. Rather than continuing the status quo, I urge you to take a stand to protect the Missouri River and change the Master Manual so it is fair to the needs of South Dakota and other upstream states.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Tom Daschle
United States Senate

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